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YOUR OPINIONS

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Letters must carry the sender's full name, address and telephone number. A pseudonym may be included.

Do we still need zoos?

WHEN *The Star* first highlighted the exploits of wildlife trader Anson Wong in August 2009, the Wildlife Protection and National Parks Department (Perhilitan) accused us of rehashing an old story. Now, we risk being accused of that again with the *Starprobe* story on the deplorable conditions in Malaysian zoos.

Yes, we agree it is an old story. But it is a story that bears repeating, for despite numerous reports on inhumane treatment of wildlife in zoos in *The Star*, little has changed. Conditions in many zoos, instead of getting better, have worsened.

That, in itself, says something about our wildlife protection agency, Perhilitan. The very body that is supposed to protect our animals is not doing its job. Perhilitan cannot claim to be ignorant of all that is happening in the zoos.

Groups like Acres, Nature Alert and Sahabat Alam Malaysia, among others, have all sent letters to Perhilitan and the ministry alerting them of the problems.

Perhilitan is supposed to check each zoo at least once a year, usually during applications to renew wildlife licences and permits. Notorious zoos are said to get more visits. Perhilitan staff are also supposed to vet the stock books (which record births, deaths and purchases of animals) of the zoos.

So how did the zoos get away with housing animals in constricted, deplorable conditions, and make them perform silly shows despite a ban?

When criticisms about poor husbandry in zoos surfaced in the past, Perhilitan fell behind the excuse that it had no jurisdiction over them as the Protection of Wildlife Act 1972 was silent about these facilities.

This loophole has since been fixed under



the new Wildlife Conservation Act 2010, yet Perhilitan now says that we have to wait until June for the enactment of new regulations on zoos. Judging from past experience, the June date might stretch to September, then December, then even years from now.

Will the animals then continue to languish in their cages? How long does it take to draft new rules when the department already has a set of guidelines on zoos (which it never enforced because of the "no jurisdiction" claim under the old Act)?

We actually have another legislation that checks on animal abuse, the Animal Act 2006, but it has hardly been used as it comes under the Veterinary Services Department, which does little enforcement work. Animal rights groups say the paltry penalty — a fine of RM200 or jail term of six months — is hardly a deterrent, but then it is better than nothing.

Poor animal welfare is just the tip of the iceberg of ills that plague our zoos. What about the harbouring of illegally-obtained endangered animals? And the keeping of animals unsuited to our hot climate and environment, such as penguins?

The unfortunate thing is that many of these acts are sanctioned by Perhilitan, which issues the permits to keep the animals. And offending zoos such as Saleng Zoo and Johor Zoo, which have been raided for illegal possession of animals, continue to

operate, and have their special permits to keep endangered species renewed.

Perhilitan should list on its website full details of every special permit given out so that everyone from non-governmental groups, scientists and the public, can help the department monitor abuses of the special permits.

It is feared that some the poorly kept zoos are actually fronts for illegal trade in animals. Action against errant zoo operators should also be listed on Perhilitan's website, so as to shame the offenders into compliance in future.

Perhilitan has talked about the formation of a Zoo Task Force but until now, there are no details about its composition and how it will operate.

Until the zoos clean up their act, we should, as suggested by some NGOs, boycott them and not take our children to visit those places which ill treat animals.

Some NGOs have also pointed out: With already 39 zoos in Peninsular Malaysia, and many of them below par, why allow the opening of more zoos? Perhilitan should make sure the existing ones are up to standard before allowing new ones to open.

We should also ask ourselves: Do we still need zoos? Do putting animals in enclosures, even open and big ones, serve any purpose in this day and age? With their poor signages, do zoos really teach people about wildlife and their conservation?

No zoo can truly recreate the kind of environment that animals such as the elephant, tiger, orang utan or sun bear inhabit in the wild. Some animals just cannot be kept humanely in captivity.

With these thoughts in mind, surely our children would be better off watching wildlife documentaries which depict animals in their wild environment.

> Rising ringgit

If RM continues to rise in our Govt opens up to meritocracy, I believe lots of our brains will be back soon. Where else is better than home? — IMALAYSIA

Ringgit strengthening to RM2.97 @ US\$. How come price of goods not lowered? During 1997 Asian crisis when ringgit fell, prices rose v fast. Not fair!

> Healthy food

Canteens at schools shld prepare food that is safe 4 consumption. That shd b priority, not banning certain types of food.

Causes of obesity r products like kueh2 n drinks dat have high sugar content, not nasi lemak, etc. Pls b logical.

> Knowing each other

Write-ups on main festivals for all communities, b it majority or minority, will help Msians understand each other better



> Parking discontent

Many shop keepers in Penang r "reserving" nearby parking bays; as though they own them! Dat's not rite.

People who double park n blk others, forcing them to hunt 4 parking lots shld b d l apologising 4 their selfish attitude.

> Cuf off their funds

D only way 2 stop terrorism is 2 cripple terror groups' financial resources. Education helps. — Siva

To fit in his shoes, Osama's successor of will try 2 outdo him. We must be on alert. — Sundra

Malice n provocation will eventually bring disaster. Osama is one overt example. — James Tan

I was there when d WTC in NY collapsed on 9-II. Terrorism has no place in dis world. — Pat

> Zoo outrage

If we can't afford to maintain d zoos, don't have them. Its a sin to be cruel to animals.

Shame on zoo operators who ill treat animals. We shld boycott dem. — M'sialniTakBoleh

It is the approach that counts

I REFER to "Don: Make literature interesting" (*The Star*, May 2). Literature is truly interesting. As an educator, I strongly support efforts to enhance the teaching of literature in primary and secondary schools.

As stated by Prof Emeritus Dr Muhammad Salleh, this subject teaches good values in the stories of the literature texts.

Currently, the Education Ministry has made literature texts compulsory for all students at secondary and primary schools. A particular English and Malay text is supposed to be read and scrutinised under the guidance of a teacher.

Although this subject is not evaluated at the end of the semester, the teaching of lit-

erature gives many benefits to students.

But, the question is whether the subject is being taught in an interesting manner or otherwise? This is the debate now.

Actually, there are many ways to make the subject interesting. Allow me to share some of my experiences teaching literature in schools.

As this subject is inter twined with language, it can be made interesting with language activities. Besides increasing vocabulary, the stipulated texts do help students to understand values.

Vocabulary activities can include crossword puzzles based on particular chapters or short stories read in the literature texts besides normal word-meaning exercises.

No doctor at hospital's A & E department

MY five-year-old was having high fever, vomiting and abdominal pain on April 26. We took him to the accident and emergency department of a private medical centre in Petaling Jaya at 8pm.

A doctor examined him and took some blood samples. He suspected appendicitis and told us that the blood results would be out at about 9.30pm.

He mentioned that if the blood results showed any suspicion of infection, my son would need to be admitted for a scan to confirm his condition. We waited anxiously and were extremely worried for him. He was in pain.

We told the staff we would wait for the

results at home as we live just across from the hospital. The hospital nurses and staff promised that they would call us 30 minutes later as it was an urgent blood test.

There was no news from the hospital. I thought no news was good news. Nevertheless, I decided to call the hospital before going to sleep.

When I rang the A & E department at about 11pm a staff nurse told me that the results were out at 9.40pm, but there was no doctor to review it.

I find it unbelievable that there was not a single doctor at the A & E department.

I went over to the hospital and found no

doctor at the A & E. Ten minutes later, a doctor came to review the blood report which showed an unusual rise in the white cell count, which meant my son had infection somewhere.

We rushed our son to another specialist with the blood result in hand where they immediately took the necessary action.

Is there any rule stating that a hospital needs to have a certain number of doctors before it can operate, especially an accident and emergency department?

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